



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

May 19, 2011

Mr. Warren M. S. Ernst  
Chief of the General Counsel Division  
City of Dallas  
1500 Marilla Street, Room 7BN  
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2011-07054

Dear Mr. Ernst:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 418202.

The City of Dallas (the "city") received a request for fourteen categories of information regarding a specified incident, and any other incidents, pertaining to an open manhole cover at a specified location. You state the city will provide the requestor with some of the requested information. You claim the remaining requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.<sup>1</sup>

Section 552.103 of the Government Code provides:

(a) Information is excepted from [required public disclosure] if it is information relating to litigation of a civil or criminal nature to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party or to which an officer or employee of the state or a political subdivision, as a consequence of the person's office or employment, is or may be a party.

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<sup>1</sup>We assume the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and, therefore, does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

...

(c) Information relating to litigation involving a governmental body or an officer or employee of a governmental body is excepted from disclosure under Subsection (a) only if the litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated on the date that the requestor applies to the officer for public information for access to or duplication of the information.

Gov't Code § 552.103(a), (c). A governmental body has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation was pending or reasonably anticipated on the date the governmental body received the request for information, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *Univ. of Tex. Law Sch. v. Tex. Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479, 481 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref'd n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). A governmental body must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

The question of whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. See Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). To establish litigation is reasonably anticipated, a governmental body must provide this office with "concrete evidence showing the claim that litigation may ensue is more than mere conjecture." *Id.* This office has concluded a governmental body's receipt of a claim letter it represents to be in compliance with the notice requirements of the Texas Tort Claims Act (the "TTCA"), chapter 101 of the Civil Practice and Remedies Code, or an applicable municipal ordinance, is sufficient to establish litigation is reasonably anticipated. See Open Records Decision No. 638 at 4 (1996).

You assert the city reasonably anticipates litigation pertaining to the remaining requested information because the individual at issue in the incident specified in the request filed a claim against the city prior to the city receiving the request for information. You state the individual's filed claim form meets the requirements of chapter XXIII of the city charter, which you have provided for our review and you state "requires written notice before any claim for injury or damage may be considered by the city." You have also provided for our review the individual's claim form, which alleges the city's liability for injuries sustained by the individual as a result of the individual stepping into an open manhole located in the crosswalk of a city street. Based on your representations and our review, we conclude the city reasonably anticipated litigation when it received the request for information. You state the preliminary claim investigation and evaluation records relate to the litigation because they pertain to the basis of the anticipated litigation. Therefore, we find section 552.103 generally applies to the information at issue. Accordingly, the city may withhold the

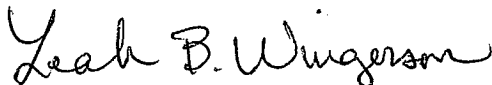
investigation and evaluation records at issue under section 552.103 of the Government Code.<sup>2</sup>

However, once information has been obtained by all parties to the litigation through discovery or otherwise, no section 552.103(a) interest exists with respect to that information. Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to the opposing party in the anticipated litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a), and must be disclosed. Further, the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends once the litigation has been concluded or is no longer reasonably anticipated. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 (1982); Open Records Decision No. 350 (1982).

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at [http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index\\_orl.php](http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/index_orl.php), or call the Office of the Attorney General's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act must be directed to the Cost Rules Administrator of the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Leah B. Wingerson  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

LBW/dls

Ref: ID# 418202

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor  
(w/o enclosures)

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<sup>2</sup>As our ruling is dispositive, we need not address your remaining argument against disclosure.